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ABSTRACT

Nonstandard English can assist rather than hinder the inner-city teacher. Once he is convinced that nonstandard English has a legitimate place in his classroom, he is on his own to devise various creative ways to employ the expressive and highly verbal language of his students. A method whereby nonstandard English can be employed to assist in the teaching of mathematics starts with the teacher requesting each of his students to provide him with a list of 15 to 20 of their favorite nonstandard English words, as well as the definitions of those words. The words should be ones that are a part of their daily lives. This will probably yield better results if it is in the form of a written homework assignment. By soliciting the students' assistance, the teacher gives them and their language a degree of status that should encourage and motivate them. Once the teacher has a substantial list of words, it is his task to create mathematics problems which incorporate the nonstandard terms. The teacher may also want to incorporate some of the customs and general background of the ghetto student. He should endeavor to make the problems meaningful and relevant. Students who previously have been encouraged and forced to reject their nonstandard English will be happy to share their words if later they can see them in print. (Author/JM)

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Ghetto Children and Mathematics

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How many teachers from inner-city schools daily find themselves wishing their students spoke standard, middle-class English rather than their familiar nonstandard English? Do you sometimes believe you could teach your students more history, English, or mathematics if they were only able to speak "your" language? Have you seriously considered using "their" language to help solve the problem and thereby to help your students? The following paragraphs will suggest a method whereby nonstandard English can be employed to assist you in the teaching of mathematics although it could be utilized in any discipline.

In recent years there has been considerable discussion both pro and con on the broad topic of nonstandard English. William Labov (1970) commented that although many words have been written about the faults of nonstandard English, its strong points certainly include brevity and clarity.

Joan Baratz (1969) reminded us that the Negro ghetto child is speaking a significantly different language from that of his middle-class teachers. Consequently, his teachers have viewed his language primarily as "lazy-speech" and this has subsequently led to reading difficulties and to failure in school. Suppose the tables were turned and daily you heard your teacher tell you that your speech was not correct. This further would say that your parents and what they tried to teach you at home were wrong. We can scarcely imagine

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what effect this negative reinforcement has upon an individual student. Furthermore, if you attempted to work mathematics problems, regardless of their difficulty, which were phrased in a "different" language from one you spoke both at home and outside of school, it is no wonder that frustration would soon set in.

Kenneth Goodman (1969) is quick to point out that daily the inarticulate student leaves the inner-city classroom and suddenly becomes articulate as he interacts with his peers. Goodman has these suggestions to offer:

1. Schools should begin to cherish, not simply tolerate, the language of all children.
2. Schools must build the pride and confidence of every child in his language.
3. Schools must see language as creative, never closing children in with taboos and restraints.

Frederick Erickson (1969) is of the opinion that teachers need to allow the experience and the language of Black ghetto children a place in the classroom. Roger Shuy (1968) has stated that, in most cases, it will be best not to destroy a lower class social dialect, for its users may need it to survive in certain social situations.

Stephen and Joan Baratz (1969) claim that the schools have completely ignored the legitimacy of the ghetto culture. From the teacher's point of view it certainly is easier if everyone uses standard English and does nothing to disrupt the teacher's daily lesson plan. Johnson (1971) accused teachers

of having one primary goal: to eradicate the nonstandard Negro dialect of disadvantaged Black children and to replace it with "correct" English.

Freeman (1973) observed that mathematics teachers do not see themselves as reading teachers, but strictly as mathematics teachers. So often educators have used the expression "Teach the whole child!" Isn't it about time that we attempt to teach the student as much as is humanly possible by being as creative as possible, regardless of our primary teaching responsibility? There is so much overlap between disciplines. This can be used to the advantage of the teacher rather than to his disadvantage.

If we as teachers truly desire to teach our students, then we need to motivate them to learn that which we are teaching. "Putting down" a student's manner of communication is not an action that will win us many enthusiastic converts. Why not make teaching truly a joint effort on the part of the student, you, and his other teachers where appropriate? Daily you teach students who have a language that abounds in richness. Why not use this abundant resource to the advantage of you and your students?

One day, when retirement seems as if it will never come and after you are thoroughly convinced that your students will never outgrow their nonstandard English heritage, why not consider the following suggestion? Ask each of your students to provide you with a list of fifteen to twenty of their favorite nonstandard English words. For your benefit you should also ask them to be certain to include the definitions. Insist that the words are ones that are a part of their daily lives. This probably will yield better results if it is in the form of a written homework assignment.

You no doubt will be surprised both at the list of words you receive and the attitude of the students who complete the assignment. By soliciting their assistance you give them and their language a degree of status that should encourage and motivate them. Once you have a substantial list of words it will be your task to create mathematics problems which incorporate the nonstandard terms you have collected. Be sure to make every effort to use all of the words submitted by your students. You may also want to incorporate some of the customs and general background of the ghetto student. Endeavor to make the problems meaningful and relevant.

Don't be surprised if you receive words such as:

1.	bad	stylish, in fashion
2.	boss	excellent, fine
3.	chinwarmer	beard or goatee
4.	deuce and a quarter	a Buick 225 automobile
5.	dufus	an ignorant person
6.	bog	an automobile
7.	piece	one's girlfriend
8.	rapping	talking
9.	fox	an attractive female
10.	tie back	to dress sharply

Students who previously have been encouraged and forced to reject their nonstandard English will be happy to share their words if later they can see them in print. If this nonstandard approach entices the student to at least read the problem with some degree of understanding, isn't this

beneficial to both the student and the teacher? Mathematics is not an easy subject for those who are very conversant with standard English. Imagine what an ordeal it must be for one who has been raised on nonstandard English!

Thus, nonstandard English can assist rather the hinder the inner-city teacher. Once you are convinced that nonstandard English has a legitimate place in your classroom, you are on your own to devise various creative ways to employ the expressive and highly verbal language of your students. After you have learned from your students, maybe your students now will truly begin to learn from you!

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